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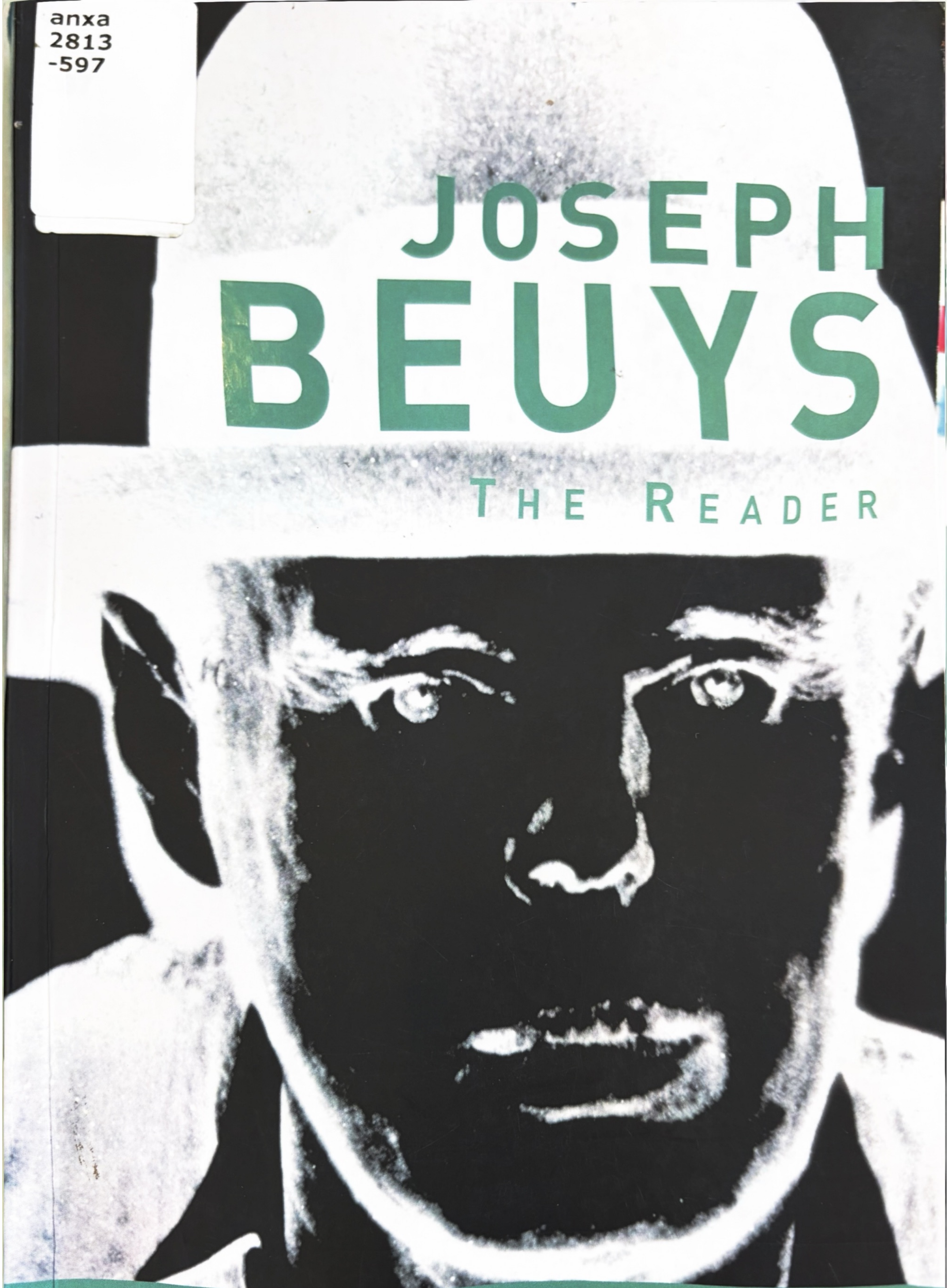
JOSEPH BEUYS

THE READER



Edited by Claudia Mesch & Viola Michely
Foreword by Arthur C. Danto

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2. BEUYS, HAACKE, BROODTHAERS*

STEFAN GERMER

> One fact is certain: commentaries on Art are the result of shifts in the economy. It seems doubtful that such commentaries can be described as political.
>
> *Marcel Broodthaers*

WALTER BENJAMIN SUGGESTED THAT in order to establish the political tendency of a work of art one should establish its *position within* the relations of production rather than its *attitude toward* them. In this way, political commitment is linked to *artistic technique*. An engaged artist is expected to show more than mere partisanship: a reflection upon the conditions in which he produces must be made part of his artistic project.[1]

In an open letter of 3 October 1972, Marcel Broodthaers demanded that Joseph Beuys reflect on the conditions of his production. He reminded Beuys that artistic production is inseparable from its institutional framework, which – far from being something marginal – determines the work of art in its very structure.[2] Broodthaers wrote his letter on the occasion of an exhibition of works by artists from Amsterdam, Paris, and Düsseldorf held at the Guggenheim Museum that year, in which works by both Beuys and Broodthaers were featured.[3]

Broodthaers found participating in a Guggenheim exhibition problematic; in fact, he eventually withdrew his works, because the museum had cancelled Hans Haacke's first American museum show the year before.[4] In a by now notorious incident, the museum cancelled the show when Haacke refused to exclude two documentations of Manhattan real-estate holdings and a poll of the museum's visitors. In a letter to the artist, Thomas Messer, the museum's director, justified the cancellation:

> We have held consistently that under our Charter we are pursuing esthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive. On those grounds the trustees have established policies that exclude the active engagement toward social and political ends. It is well understood, in this connection, that art may have social and political consequences, but these, we believe, are furthered by indirection and by the generalized, exemplary force that works of art may exert upon the environment, not as you propose, by using political means to achieve political ends, no matter how desirable these may appear to be in themselves. We maintain, in other words, that while art cannot be arbitrarily confined, our institutional role is limited. Consequently, we function within such limits, leaving to others that which we consider outside our professional competence.[5]

Even though Messer stated that he had no intention of restricting artistic practice, he formulated the conditions that a work of art had to fulfil in order to be acceptable within the museum space. Following the idealist concept of the autonomy of art, art is seen as distinct from the social, and the museum is defined as a neutral, non-social, apolitical institution.

The work of art is expected to confirm this fiction and thus to appear as the result of a process of production which, in its *artistic* character, differs from other forms of social production. Far better than any restriction of content, this institutional insistence on the specificity of artistic practice neutralizes all political implications of an artwork, since it forces the artist to depoliticize his work in his choice of means. Only in a generalized and unspecific way is 'outside reality' accepted into the museum space; the boundary between art and society is thus kept intact, while the social determination of the artwork remains unreflected and the political character of museum decisions unacknowledged.

Haacke's works did not follow these rules. Extending the project of Marcel Duchamp – who had demonstrated the degree to which the concept of the aesthetic autonomy was dependent upon the institutional mechanisms of exclusion – Haacke introduced systems into the museum space that challenged its alleged neutrality. These were systems that functioned in accordance with physical, biological, and social laws of change, growth, and exploitation. Haacke described the effect of this confrontation:

> If you work with real-time systems, well you probably go beyond Duchamp's position. Real-time systems are double agents. They might run under the heading 'art', but this culturalization does not prevent them from operating as normal.[6]

While Duchamp took the *separation* of cultural and social spheres as his point of departure, demonstrating that it was not the specific quality of an object but only the place and form of its presentation that decided its status, Haacke insisted on the *continuity* between both spheres, thereby unmasking the interests governing the seemingly neutral museum space, and thus making the political uses of culture apparent. While Duchamp *used* the concept of the autonomy of art, Haacke *attacked* it.

The cancellation of Haacke's exhibition made apparent the extent to which the museum expected its specific mechanisms of exclusion to be respected. This meant that an artist's political practice would have to take into account the institutional limitations of his role. Without consideration of the political character of the institutional framework within which a work of art is presented, the work is in danger of being neutralized, absorbed, and turned into an insignia of power. Broodthaers denied this very threat:

> Art is a prisoner of its phantasms and its function as magic; it hangs on our bourgeois walls as a sign of power, it flickers along the peripheries of our history like a shadow-play – but is it artistic?[7]

From this vantage point it would be foolhardy to rely on the 'magic of art' or to believe in its power. Whoever speaks of the power of art deceives himself about the true character of political power and the actual function of art in society. Wishing to find aesthetic answers to political questions, he believes that, by inventing rather than analyzing social conditions, he could actually contribute to their change. Certainly the most important recent exponent of such a belief was Joseph Beuys.

When the show of the Düsseldorf artists opened at the Guggenheim, it became clear how quickly and easily Beuys' political messages could be absorbed by the institution. Beuys showed a primitive flag and a fur trunk, an ensemble he named *Gundfana of the West – Genghis Khan's Flag* and an object that detailed the social programme of his *Organization für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* ('Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum'). Both pieces, which the artist explicitly characterized as political, were shown in the very museum that had banned Haacke's work because of its political nature.

Sensitive to the political reasons for the museum's inclusion and exclusion of artists, Broodthaers decided to withdraw his works as an act of solidarity with Haacke.[8] Beuys, meanwhile, remained indifferent to the Guggenheim's act of censorship. Beuys' position led to the suspicion that there was in fact a *connection* between his definition of art and politics and his indifference to an actual political conflict; and therefore Broodthaers raised precisely this issue in his questioning of Beuys' equation of art and politics.

To Broodthaers, the situation had an exemplary character, and he therefore renounced the idea of a direct polemic against Beuys; instead he formulated his critique in the form of a historical fiction. In his open letter, Broodthaers reports that he has found, in a dilapidated Cologne slum tenement, a letter addressed to Richard Wagner from Jacques Offenbach; and he has decided to copy this letter and send it to Beuys in lieu of his own.[9] In the fragmentarily legible document, Offenbach comments on the difference between his and Wagner's conception of the relationship between art and politics and expresses his doubts regarding Wagner's receiving the patronage of King Ludwig II of Bavaria. In the historical fiction the allusion to recent New York events becomes clear:

> King Louis [Ludwig] II had Hans H. sent away [from] his castles. His Majesty prefers you to this specialist of compositions for the flute. I can understand – if it is a matter of artistic choice. But is not the enthusiasm that His Majesty displays for you motivated by a political choice as well? I hope this question disturbs you as much as it does me. What ends do you serve, Wagner? Why? How?[10]

Offenbach and Wagner are more than merely alter egos for Broodthaers and Beuys respectively. They represent two fundamentally different conceptions of the social role of the artist. Broodthaers labels the identification of art and politics *Wagner,* and has Offenbach say:

> Your essay 'Art and Revolution' ... discusses ... magic ... politics ... which you must be aware of. The politics of magic? of beauty or of ugliness? ... Messiah ... In this struggle against the degeneration of art the musical drama would thus be the only form capable of uniting all the arts. I can hardly go along with that contention of yours, and at any rate I wish to register my disagreement if you allow a definition of art to include one of politics ... and ... magic.[11]

Broodthaers refers here to events that immediately preceded the New York exhibition. At Documenta V in Kassel (30 June–8 October 1972) Beuys had set up an 'Information Office' to propagate the ideas of his *Organization für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung.* The programme of that organization was characterized precisely by the confusion or conflation of art and politics that Broodthaers criticizes in his open letter. At Documenta, Beuys had stated:

> In the future all truly political intentions will have to be artistic ones. This means that they will have to stem from human creativity and individual liberty. This is why I concern myself mainly with the problem of schools, with pedagogy. But mine is a model of freedom that must be understood as revolutionary. It

> is a model that issues from human thinking and the education of man in this sphere of freedom … this cultural sector, of which the institutions, the means of information are part … here would be a free press, free TV, and so on. They must be free from all state intervention. I am trying to develop a revolutionary model that formulates the basic democratic order in accordance with the people's wishes, because we want the rule of the people … I want an area of freedom, which should be recognized as the area that breeds revolution, that changes the basic democratic order and then restructures the economic sector in a way that will serve the people's needs and not the needs of a minority that wants to make its profits. That is the connection, and this I define as Art.[12]

In this conception, the position of art is secure, and the role of the artist is unquestioned. By identifying political and artistic practice with one another, Beuys avoids the issue of the social relevance of his activity, since he borrows for it the aura of the political. The necessary precondition for this is the aestheticization of the political. Abstracting from actual conditions, Beuys in effect invents state and society, thus making both into artistic creations. In this aestheticization of politics Beuys follows Rudolf Steiner,[13] who, in his series of lectures entitled *Über die Bienen* ('On the Bees', 1923), had presented the organization of bee communities as a model for human society. Steiner defined this organization as the result of two *formative processes*: the 'crystalline-anorganic' construction of the honeycombs, and the 'organic-energetic' production of warmth within these combs. By analogy, Beuys could declare state and society (or, as he called them in a telling biologistic metaphor, the 'social organism') to be *works of sculpture.* In this fashion artistic practice was made the paradigm of all human activity, and creativity was presented as the means to shape and change society.

Consequently, Beuys defined the artist's task as one of making people aware of their creativity, as a demonstration of the possibility of change by employing creativity, and finally as the initiation of the necessary changes. The goal of this sculptural-political process was defined as a reorganization of society in a fundamentally democratic fashion.[14] Beuys' political programme thus combined ideas as different as Steiner's definition of state and society, the concept of extended creativity put forward by the Fluxus movement, and the political demands formulated by the 1960s Ausserparlamentarische Opposition (APO, or Extra-Parliamentary Opposition). The intention of the Fluxus movement had been to free creativity from its confinement to the 'artistic field' by generating an awareness of creativity inherent in every activity, and was thus directed at the abolishment of the distinction between artistic and non-artistic practices. As Fluxus' principal organizer, George Maciunas, declared:

> The aims of Fluxus are social (not aesthetic) like the LEF Group – 1929 – in the Soviet Union – and are directed to: step by step elimination of the Fine Arts ... This motivates the desire to redirect the use of materials and human ability into socially constructive purposes ... So Fluxus is strictly against the artist with an income. At most it can have the pedagogic function of making clear how superfluous art is and how superfluous the object itself is ... Secondly, Fluxus is against art as a medium for the artist's ego ... and tends therefore towards the spirit of the collective, to anonymity and ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM ... the best Fluxus composition is one which is most strongly impersonal and readymade.[15]

Beuys shared the Fluxus movement's definition of extended creativity; his own practice, however, differed from the conception sketched by Maciunas to such an extent as to appear almost as its opposite. The difference was intentional: Beuys criticized Fluxus artists for what he considered an obsession with negating the traditional definition of art. Beuys insisted that instead of repeatedly demonstrating the futility of the separation between the artistic and social spheres, artists should apply their conception of extended creativity directly to society:

> They [the Fluxus artists] depended on a dramatic mise-en-scene of materials, without wanting to specify concepts. They were lacking a theory, an epistemological substructure, so to speak, with a clearly defined goal.

> They held a mirror up to the people without any effect and without any improvement of the situation.[16]

Beuys believed that Steiner's theories provided him with the 'epistemological substructure' he found lacking in Fluxus events, while the idea of 'direct democracy' was the 'clearly defined goal' that would permit him to go beyond Dada-like actions – to genuine political action.

The concept of direct democracy had initially been formulated by the extra-parliamentary opposition in the late 1960s. In those years West Germany's two major parties – Social Democrats and Christian Democrats – had formed the so-called Great Coalition, which encountered only weak opposition within parliament. This meant that any real reflection upon crucial political issues – the suspension of fundamental rights in a 'state of emergency', the monopolization of economic power in West Germany, the country's relationship with the USA during the Vietnam war, continuities between the Third Reich and the Federal Republic – was left to the student movement, which understood itself as part of a larger extra-parliamentary opposition.

Peter Brüchner and Johannes Agnoli analyzed the failure of the representative parliamentary system in their book *Die Transformation der Demokratie* ('The Transformation of Democracy'). The authors demonstrated how the parliament functioned as an agency for capitalist interests, excluded the majority of the people from political decisions, and was both unable and unwilling to control increasing monopolization in the economic sector. As a solution, the authors called for the formation of a *Fundamentalopposition*, which would organize itself in a system of councils that were to supplement and eventually to supplant the parliamentary system.[17]

Beuys borrowed the jargon but not the analysis of the extra-parliamentary opposition when he formulated his political programme. Thus his various organizational attempts – which ranged from the formation of the *Studentenpartei* (Students' Party, 1967) to the *Organization der Nichtwähler* (Organization of Non-Voters, 1970) to the *Organization für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum, 1971) appear more as a mimicry of politics than an actual attempt to politicize artistic practice. In no respect do the programmes of Beuys' organizations correspond to political realities. Instead of following the extra-parliamentary opposition in its analysis of the economic structures of West German society, Beuys declared the 'abolishment of the two-party dictatorship' his main goal, and – adapting one of Steiner's ideas for current purposes – demanded the 'tri-partition of the social organism' in order to liberate individual creativity. Taken as a whole, the mixture of Steiner's ideas, the Fluxus concept of extended creativity, and the slogans of the extra-parliamentary opposition formed less a coherent political programme than a monumental apology for the artist. What had appeared as a radicalization of the Fluxus position was in fact a regression from it, since, for Beuys, *only the application, not the concept of art* seemed problematic. His enterprise is thus ultimately a conservative one, aiming only at restoring to the marginalized artist a central social role. This explains Beuys' insistence on the importance of *individual* creativity.

It was this concept that had most fascinated Beuys in Steiner's thought. Steiner declared creativity a transhistorical quality of man, which enabled him to shape the world according to his desires. For Beuys, as for Steiner, change is a question of subjective volition:

> If one is willing to enlarge art – the concept of art – to such an extent that it would also comprise the concept of science, and thus the whole of human creativity, then it follows that change to the conditions is a matter of human volition ... which means: if man realized the power of self-determination, then starting from it he will one day build democracy. He will abolish all nondemocratic institutions simply by practising self-determination.[18]

Belief in the power of creativity is both utopian and reactionary. *Utopian* because this concept gives back to the individual his labour power and thus opposes the division of labour characteristic of capitalist societies. *Reactionary* because it makes this reappropriation appear as an act of individual volition, independent of all social preconditions.

The historical context for Beuys' hypostasis of individual creativity can be determined in a more specific fashion. Post-Second World War West German ideology has been characterized by dehistoricization and concentration on the labour power of the individual. In an attempt to repress the memory of fascism, all historical context was obscured and all energies were directed to *Wiederaufbau* ('reconstruction'), represented as the achievement of individuals. In this perspective, the economic restoration appeared as a *Wirtschaftswunder* ('economic miracle'), and the work of the individual assumed mythical status.

In true Herculean manner, Beuys denied his own biography as a sequence of 'works' and made all historical reality disappear behind a self-created myth of the artist-hero. This self-mythification begins with the crash of Luftwaffe pilot Beuys in the Crimea and his acceptance by a local group of Tartars, who shelter him with felt and fat.[19] The myth continues in the invention of state and society. In the end, Beuys' audience is presented with a system of interconnecting links and mutually supporting interpretations and definitions that no longer permit a consideration of anything outside the system. This system can only be understood through its own carefully constructed 'evidence'; it is especially in this respect that Beuys' procedure resembles that of Richard Wagner.

The composer had attempted to compensate for the social marginalization of the artist by extending the aesthetic realm to encompass the whole of society. In his exile in Zurich – following the failure of the Revolution of 1848–1849, in which Wagner had played an important part – he elaborated this concept in the essays 'Art and Revolution', 'The Artwork of the Future' and 'Opera and Drama'.[20]

Taking Greek tragedy as his model, Wagner envisioned the 'artwork of the future' as the centre of a cult in which the people as a whole would take part and which would fundamentally affect every individual. Originally, Wagner linked the creation of such a *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the overthrow of the capitalist system, and particularly to the abolishment of the division of labour. Once the preoccupation with everyday needs had ceased – Wagner wrote[21] – all activities of liberated mankind would assume artistic features; thus the whole society would become a work of art.

But while the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was in this manner first conceived as the consequence of successful revolution, its meaning changed as Wagner's disappointment with the political situation grew. Eventually, Wagner envisioned the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as merely the *prophecy* of revolution and ultimately as its *substitute.* Even though none of its social preconditions were given, Wagner still insisted on realizing his *Gesamtkunstwerk*; he wanted to reconcile aesthetically what had remained irreconcilable in society. In order to do so he had to change both his own status and that of his work: while at first he wanted to express the dominant tendency of his epoch and thus conceived of his work as part of a universal social change, he now claimed this universality for his art. The precondition for this claim was dehistoricization, and thus Wagner's work finds its content in the prehistorical world of German myth.

Mythology permits the artist to style himself as a creator who is unbound by historical conditions and is able to shape the world according to his own desires. To be convincing, however, this fiction depends on the exclusion of every remnant of historical reality. In Wagner's work this operation took the form of an aesthetic substitution: in order to make the social totality disappear, the work itself had to assume a totalizing character. The artist thus forced music, poetry, and dance together, pretending that these media converged in the same project, while their amalgamation was in fact achieved only by his volition, not by any inner necessity. The combination of media is supposed to form a coherent work of art, which in its perfection and its over-determination of aesthetic means anxiously conceals the process of production behind the spectacular appearance of the product. Adorno defined Wagner's formal principle as precisely this attempt to conceal the conditions of production behind the appearance of the product, and continued in his description:

> This is the objective explanation for what is generally thought of in psychological terms as Wagner's mendacity. To make works of art into magical objects means that men worship their own labour because they are unable to recognize it as such. It is this that makes his works pure appearance – an absolutely immediate, as it were, spatial phenomenon.[22]

The 'magic of the artwork' resembles the phantasmagorical appeal of the fetish: instead of counterbalancing its attraction, the work of art mimics the commodity. Like the commodity, it is worshipped because the labour, the society, and the history that produced the work of art are concealed behind its spectacular effects. Wagner's aesthetic ideology kept him from realizing the congruence between his practice and the fetishization of commodities. Having stylized the aesthetic realm into a totality and thus remaining unable to determine his position in relation to the conditions of production, Wagner did not realize that, in concealing the social determination of his works, he followed that very determination.

Beuys was the victim of a similar illusion. Unlike Wagner, however, he could no longer maintain the credibility of his production by presenting the work of art as a self-contained, autonomous whole separate from society, since he worked in a period not only in which the commodity status of the art object had become apparent, but in which avant-garde practice constituted itself through a reflection upon that status. In this situation, Beuys renounced the fiction of the work of art as an autonomous whole and attempted to escape the social restrictions of artistic practice by regressing to a pre-societal state, archaically defining his work through the *presence* of the artist. This displacement proved to be a very efficient strategy for avoiding the question of the social relevance of artistic practice, because it allowed Beuys to acknowledge the particularity of his art objects while still claiming universality for his practice as a whole.

The fragmentary character of Beuys' objects is thus deceptive: although they mimic the allegorical form by inviting the beholders' participation, their understanding is always already pre-established within the totalizing system of meaning that Beuys supplied for them. It is within an interpretative discourse emanating from the artist himself that meaning is assigned to the individual works. The beholder's role is thereby restricted to ratifying a *Gesamtkunstwerk* whose logic of production eludes him, since it stems from the artist's volition. Beuys' concept thus required an interpretation that reduced critical commentary to a tautological repetition of his ideas, an interpretation thus incapable of assessing the artist's claims about the social and political implications of his work.

As in Wagner's case, the political is replaced by a totalizing aesthetic concept. But the emphasis with which Beuys' objects insist on *being something other than just art objects* betrays the act of repression necessary to maintain that fiction. Moreover, the more Beuys refused to acknowledge the social conditions of his practice, the more he fell prey to them. The concept of universal creativity prohibits the artist from recognizing the actual social function of artistic practice, since it blurs the boundaries between art and society, thus making it impossible to reflect on the institutional limitations of artistic production.

Broodthaers takes these institutional limitations as his starting point. By choosing Offenbach as his example, he indicates that artistic practice is less a mythical act of primal creation than the result of the necessities of the culture industry and the pressures of political censorship. The artist's political engagement cannot consist in expanding art into society, but only in reducing art's claims through the deconstruction of those mechanisms that establish and maintain 'the artistic' as different from other social practices. Instead of supplying the market with so-called 'political art', which would maintain the illusionary belief in the power of art, Broodthaers undermined this confidence in art through strategies of ironic affirmation.

Jacques Offenbach's work provided an example for such an intellectual subversion of the apparatus of production, which the composer neither owned nor controlled; thus it seemed to Broodthaers a suitable strategy for those forced to cater to the culture industry. Like Wagner, Offenbach operated in the reactionary period following the defeat of the 1848 revolution, but unlike Wagner, Offenbach could not take refuge to a mythical past, since his genre – the operetta – required cooperation with existing forces and conditions. Offenbach provided his audience with the entertainment it believed art to be; but he entertained his public with a parody of its own social mores and expectations. Offenbach's operettas could thus become a powerful instrument of oppositional critique. Siegfried Kracauer, who, during his exile from Nazi Germany, wrote a biography of the composer, was especially interested in this oppositional strategy:

> In a time characterized by the hardening of the bourgeoisie and the almost complete impotence of

> the Left, Offenbach's operetta became the decisive medium of revolutionary protest. It provoked laughter that penetrated the prescribed silence and excited its audience to opposition while seeming only to entertain it.[23]

Broodthaers realized the usefulness of Offenbach's strategy of ironic affirmation in a situation in which a self-mystification such as that of Joseph Beuys tended to obscure the actual social position of the artist. Like Offenbach, Broodthaers undermined his audience's expectations of art by fulfilling them – a strategy already evident in his declaration that the desire to make money and invent 'something insincere' stood at the beginning of his artistic career.[24] Art is refused any quality that would separate it from the commodity, and thus the actual status of the arts in the era of universal commodification is defined:

> I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of Art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of Art into merchandise. This process is accelerated nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. If we are concerned with the phenomenon of reification, then Art is a particular representation of the phenomenon – a form of tautology. We could then justify it as an affirmation of existing conditions, which would give it a suspect character.[25]

NOTES

* *October* no. 45 (Summer, 1988).

1. Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum, 1984), pp. 297–309.
2. Marcel Broodthaers, 'Mon cher Beuys', Düsseldorf, 25 September 1972; published under the title 'Politik der Magie? Offener Brief von Broodthaers an Beuys', *Rheinische Post* (3 October 1972); reprinted in Broodthaers, *Magie. Art et Politique* (Paris: Multiplicata, 1973), pp. 8–12; and reproduced in Birgit Pelzer,

'Recourse to the Letter', *October* no. 42 (Fall 1987), pp. 174–6.

3. See *Amsterdam-Paris-Düsseldorf* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1972), nos. 108, 109 (Beuys) and nos. 110 and 111 (Broodthaers).
4. For the fullest account of this incident, see Rosalyn Deutsche, 'Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate and the Museum', in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (New York: New Museum, 1986), pp. 20–37.
5. See Thomas M. Messer's letter to Hans Haacke of March 19, 1971, published in 'Gurgles at the Guggenheim', *Studio International*, vol. 181, no. 934 (June 1971), pp. 248–9.
6. Jeanne Siegel, 'Interview with Hans Haacke', *Arts Magazine* (May 1971), p. 21.
7. Broodthaers, 'To be bien pensant... or not to be. To be blind' (1975), translated by Paul Schmidt, *October*, no. 42 (Fall 1987), p. 35.
8. According to the Guggenheim Museum's wall-list, Broodthaers' works were still shown in New York but withdrawn from the subsequent presentations of the exhibition.
9. For Broodthaers' open letters, see Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Open Letters, Industrial Poems', *October*, no. 42 (Fall 1987), pp. 67–100; and Birgit Pelzer, 'Recourse to the Letter', pp. 157–81.
10. Quoted after the reprinted letter in *October*, no. 42, pp. 175–6.
11. *October*, no. 42, p. 175.
12. Joseph Beuys, quoted in Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys* (Cologne: DuMont Verlag, 1973), pp. 163 ff. (author's translation).
13. For the impact of Steiner's ideas on Beuys, see Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1979), in particular *SaFG-SaUG* (1953–1958) and *Honey Pump*. In connection with Beuys' political actions, see Ibid. p. 269.
14. Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, pp. 265 ff.
15. From a letter to Tomas Schmit of January 1964, quoted in Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 84.
16. Beuys, in Adriani, Konnertz, Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 53 (author's translation).
17. Johannes Agnoli and Peter Brückner, *Die Transformation der Demokratie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968).
18. Beuys, in Adriani, Konnertz, Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 154 (author's translation).
19. For a demystification, see Buchloh, 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol', *Artforum* (June 1980), pp. 35 ff. (reprinted in this volume); and Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, 'Joseph

Beuys at the Guggenheim', *October*, no. 12 (Spring 1980), pp. 3–21.

20. Richard Wagner, 'Kunst und Revolution', in Dieter Borchmeyer (ed.), *Dichtungen und Schriften* vol. III (Frankfurt a.M.: 1983), 273 ff. See also Rainer Franke, *Richard Wagners Züricher Kunstschriften* (Hamburg, 1983).
21. See Borchmeyer, p. 301.
22. Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (London: New Left Books, 1981), p. 83.
23. Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), p. 280.
24. I am, of course, referring to the first exhibition at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels in 1964 and the statement published by the artist on that occasion. For a discussion of Broodthaers' statement see Buchloh, 'Open Letters', pp. 73 ff.
25. Broodthaers, 'Über die Kunst – im Sinne einer Antwort an Jürgen Harten', *Magazin Kunst*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1975), pp. 73–4.

3. BEUYS AND BROODTHAERS

Dialectics of Modernity between 'Analytic Geometry and the Belief in an Unbelieving God'*

DOROTHEA ZWIRNER

BEUYS AND BROODTHAERS BOTH occupy singular positions within late-twentieth-century modernism; it is no coincidence that they clashed. Despite their differences, both artists had several things in common: they shared collectors and patrons such as Johannes Cladders, Anny de Decker, Isi Fiszman, Reiner Speck, Harald Szeemann, Paul Wember and many more; both dealt with the oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp; they shared their critique of traditional institutions, the use of vitrines and of visual material interwoven with conceptually analytic material in the oeuvre, as well as the dissolution of a firmly defined art concept with a materially binding classification in moving towards a process-oriented work of art. This essay will discuss how similar approaches and means of expression in the oeuvres of these artists nonetheless point in different directions. First, the personal relationship between the two artists will be reconstructed using surviving data and facts in order to produce a concrete comparison of individual works that reveals structural similarities and differences. Structural points of comparison will be traced in their mutual address of language, politics and history, especially that of the Romantics. These topics can only be touched upon within the scope of this essay. This comparison of Beuys and Broodthaers seeks to determine the artistic location of each of the two artists more closely, from an historical perspective. [...]

In addition to Joseph Beuys, Marcel Broodthaers was one of the most important and prolific artists of the Wide White Space (WWS) Gallery in Antwerp, one of the leading European avant-garde galleries during its existence from 1966 until 1976.[1] Due to the mediation of Bernd Lohaus, art student at the Düsseldorf Academy and companion of the gallery owner Anny de Decker, a close contact was established between Antwerp and the Rhineland, especially with the Düsseldorf Art Academy and the Fluxus artists acquainted with Joseph Beuys. Beuys and Broodthaers probably met for the first time around 1966–67 through Isi Fiszman, the most important collector and supporter of the WWS Gallery. At the time Beuys had been a professor at the Düsseldorf Academy for five years, while Broodthaers had just begun his career as an artist in 1964.

Beyond their joint participation in various group exhibitions at the WWS Gallery, each of the artists became familiar with the other's work. Broodthaers suggested filming Beuys' performance *Eurasienstab* in February 1968.[2] Shortly before this performance, Broodthaers had completed the film *Le Corbeau et le Renard* for the experimental film festival at Knokke-Le-Zout, which was the starting point for the following exhibition at the WWS Gallery in March 1968. Thus Broodthaers was able to organize a professional cameraman for the Beuys performance. Several months later, Broodthaers addressed an open letter to Beuys which is less well known than his second one from 1972, but which already reveals a certain ambivalence on his part towards Beuys.[3] Nonetheless, the letter starts with a declaration of sympathy and friendship:

> Brussels, 14 July 1968
>
> My dear Beuys,
>
> Oh God, born in another world it was so difficult to call a German a friend. You are my friend and Dutschke is my friend. Beautiful Germany is again reviving. [...] Oh Beuys, poet of the concentration camp, with your copper-plated tables, with your magic spark, your felt pieces full of graveyards, your beds encircled by pestilence; with your new friends, South Americans, Jews, Yankees... Are we standing on the threshold of a new slaughter?

> I smell the distant decaying of flesh. Are we correctly informed? Here we do not know much about your art, no more than they do in France. Our journalists are strange. Here in Brussels they have announced the founding of a Museum of Modern Art. Nobody believes it. [...] Beuys, see you soon. Many people here cannot decide between analytic geometry and faith in an unbelieving god.
>
> Marcel Broodthaers
> M.B.

Like all open letters, it was sent out in small numbers to friends and acquaintances in the art scene.[4] The letter was triggered by a confrontation with the German past; after the euphoria of Germany's so-called 'economic miracle' and the typical mechanisms of the 1950s and 1960s of forgetting, the past was then claimed by a new generation – the '68 movement – represented here by Beuys and Rudi Dutschke.[5] The biography and work of Beuys is especially characterized by this problematic German manner of coping with the past, which made him *the* artist of post-war Germany for his scholars, while his critics saw echoes of Germanic *Völk*-ishness in his work.

The interwoven biographical and artistic aspects of Beuys' work are clearly documented by his air crash in the Crimea. The Crimea episode is so central to Beuys' biography that it is widely held to be a myth; without investigating the substance of the event, Caroline Tisdall places special emphasis on the relation between Beuys' work and the accident: 'It is certainly true that without this encounter with the Tartars, and with the ritualistic respect for the healing potential of materials, Beuys would never have turned to fat and felt as material for sculpture.'[6] While Tisdall accentuates the semantic dimension of the material and bases her assumptions more strongly on the artwork, Benjamin Buchloh's critique concentrates on Beuys' persona, his statements and his public self-representations.[7] According to Buchloh's analysis, the Beuys crash, followed by his several-day coma and rescue by the Tartars, is contradictory in itself and is stylized as an archaic myth. On the one hand it can be interpreted as paraphrasing the myth of (the) phoenix and on the other as the wound of a stifled past, the loss of memory and history commonly suffered by the Nazi-regime war generation. Within his initial and sustained critique of Beuys, Buchloh still acknowledges: 'It is in making a theme out of a suppressed German past that Joseph Beuys' art developed strength, its very own specific nature and authenticity; here lies the credibility of his material and of his art's morphology.'[8]

It will remain unresolved as to what extent the reciprocal permeation of art and life is to be seen as an intuitive metaphor, as a programmatic method or as a strategic calculation. In Beuys' case, this permeation generated a mystical/mythical stylization of his persona and biography. The mere phenomena of self-stylization and of creating myths groups Beuys within the historical context of the 1950s, along with other post-war artists such as Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, and later Andy Warhol and Marcel Broodthaers; they all made their personas into a subject of their work. As early as 1962, Piero Manzoni declared and certified Marcel Broodthaers as a work of living art. When one thinks of Broodthaers' various roles as museum director, actor in his own films, and commentator on his own work and that of other artists, these two fundamentally different behaviour patterns become apparent, and can be distinguished from one another through degrees of consciousness of disclosure. While in the case of Beuys artistic and biographical aspects in their reciprocal permeation are inextricably linked, Broodthaers never leaves any doubt in the mind of the viewer about the fictional character of his role play, which he demonstrates with certificates, letters, props and costumes.

At times, Beuys' self-styling seems to be on a strategic and tactical level, while at other points it seems to take place on a semi-conscious or subconscious level that appears to result from direct access to the subconscious mind, serving a creative process of change and healing. Broodthaers uses his playful and ironic character to attempt to take on the Cartesian position outside of himself that is customarily known as self-reflection. This does not mean that Beuys lacks any form of self-reflection. On the contrary, in his self-characterization as a shaman, Beuys seemed to want to overcome and heal that specific state of the split self that signifies the intellectual. The mystical figure of the shaman can be compared to the tragic figure of the self-reflecting Narcissus, with whom Broodthaers compares the artist.[9] A shaman initiation occurs by simulating death, thereby making today's death character surmountable in the future; [10] on the other hand the tragic fate of Narcissus admonishes us to endure the vivid tension of the split self in the present.

In considering these differing concepts of self-image in the role of the artist it becomes clear as to why Beuys' past in the war – however marginal his role may have been – and its mythical stylization were reasons for suspicion on the part of Broodthaers.[11] After all, Broodthaers had, as a young man, joined the Resistance against Nazi Germany, probably in an equally marginal role. One should not forget that a strong dislike of Germans lingered at the time in Belgium, as in all of Germany's neighbouring countries. [...] Nonetheless, it is said that there was a hearty joviality between the two and Broodthaers acknowledged Beuys' creative talent.[12]

In his description of Beuys' oeuvre, Broodthaers places great emphasis on suggestive allusions to the Second World War. What Broodthaers doubtlessly had in mind was Beuys' sculpture, previously exhibited at *Documenta 4* in Kassel; two years later, it had already become part of the Ströher Collection at the Darmstadt Landesmuseum.[13] In comparison to the neighbouring installation *Roxy's* by Edward Kienholz, the copper tables, bed constructions and technical supplies from the physical sciences had an enormous suggestive impact, and made Beuys the first and only German artist to be presented in an international context.[14] In addressing Beuys as 'Poète concentrationnaire' (poet of the concentration camp), the associations with Auschwitz seemed problematic to Broodthaers, in accordance with Adorno's dictum that after Auschwitz no more poetry could ever be written. [...]

Finally, the open letter ends with a remark on the two kinds of people who are torn between 'analytic geometry and the belief in an unbelieving god', which clearly demonstrates Broodthaers' antagonistic attitude towards Beuys. However, rationality and belief or Enlightenment and mythology are dialectical contradictions, which, as in all contradictions, are simultaneously dependent on each other while remaining exclusive of each other. In his polarization Broodthaers opens a space for nuance when he formulates 'analytic geometry' as the progression of 'synthetic geometry' or uses 'faith in an unbelieving god' to accentuate the rational doubt implied by faith. This use of contradictory poles will prove a good criterion for the comparison of the works of both artists.

Written in the year of the student revolts in 1968, Broodthaers would react to the critique of institutions by founding his own museum in his flat in the Rue de la Pépinière on 26 September, which he had already casually announced in the letter he wrote to Beuys in June 1968. In May, Broodthaers participated in the occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, but some days later he had already distanced himself from the other activists. Broodthaers used a strategy of 'semblant' (appearance) when instituting his own museum.[15] The strategy revealed itself to be just that. In contrast, Beuys strove for a true reconciliation between art and life on the level of the extended concept of art in founding the 'Deutsche Studentenpartei' (German Student Party) in 1967 and successive organizations such as the 'Organization für direkte Demokratie' (Organization for Direct Democracy) in 1971 and the 'Freie Internationale Universität' (Free International University) in 1973. It is true that Broodthaers loved to diffuse the difference between appearance and reality, play and honesty, but only as a means to sharpen the boundaries between art and life. His museum was constructed as a place to experience the process of symbolization. Fiction provides us with a stronger awareness of reality: 'Fiction allows us to grasp reality while still grasping what fiction conceals.'[16] In this respect, Broodthaers differs from Beuys in that he never dealt with the social, institutional and economic conditions of art on a primarily political level but rather on a fictional and poetic one, which the second open letter to Beuys of 1972 substantiates. [...]

This latent tension culminated when Beuys appeared at Broodthaers' 'Eagle Exhibition' at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf with a television crew in order to give an interview without the artist's permission; this entailed using the setting of Broodthaers' exhibition to present himself. [...] Broodthaers had collected 266 eagle objects from various museums and other sources for the exhibition 'The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present' for his *Section des Figures,* which had received recognition in the art scene. All objects were captioned in three languages: 'This is not a work of art.' With the evident paradox between the description, the exhibited object and its museological context, Marcel Broodthaers reversed the right of the artist – introduced by Duchamp and further developed by Manzoni – to declare anything a work of art by using a variant of Magritte's *'Ceci n'est pas une pipe.'*[17] Broodthaers' epistemological interest combined Magritte's visually immanent questions with the contextual discourse of Duchamp. While Broodthaers declared his explicit support for Duchamp by referring to the urinal in the accompanying catalogue, Beuys criticized Duchamp's concept of non-art in his performance *Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet* ('The Silence of Marcel Duchamp Is Overrated') of 1964. [...]

It was not until the end of the year that Broodthaers found the appropriate means to react to Beuys' violation of his artistic integrity. He used the fiction of a recovered letter from Jacques Offenbach addressed to Richard Wagner as a masquerade to express his differences with Beuys in a rather elegant manner. He writes in his second open letter to Beuys:

> I can hardly go along with that contention of yours, and at any rate I wish to register my disagreement if you allow a definition of art to include one of politics ... and ... magic ... My dear Wagner, our relations have become strained. I dare say this will be the last message I am sending you.[18]

The model of identification is clear. 'Broodthaers – Flemish but proficient in French thinking – lets Jacques Offenbach, the Cologne-born composer with lucid French *esprit,* write to Wagner, the Germanic magician of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ('synthesis of the arts') – or even to Beuys, the magician of art-is-life-is-politics-romanticism.' This was the explanation provided in the introduction to the open letter published in the *Rheinische Post* of 3 October 1972.[19] The following passage supplies the background to the open letter:

> King Ludwig II. had Hans H. sent away from his castles. His Majesty prefers you to this specialist of compositions for the flute. I can understand – if it is a matter of artistic choice. But is not the enthusiasm that His Majesty displays for you motivated by a political choice as well?

> I hope this question disturbs you as much as it does me. What ends do you serve, Wagner? Why? How? Miserable artists that we are.
>
> Vive la Musique!
>
> Jacques Offenbach

This farewell letter to Beuys was motivated not only by Broodthaers' move to London, but also by the rejection of a Hans Haacke exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1971, for apparently political reasons.[20] Beuys and Broodthaers were invited to the exhibition 'Paris-Düsseldorf-Amsterdam' at the Guggenheim Museum in the following year; their participation would evidently have been regarded as supportive of the museum's policy of censorship that had caused such a stir within the art scene. Beuys tried to react to this precarious situation by exhibiting only his programme for the *Organization for Direct Democracy by Referendum*. Broodthaers instead withdrew from New York his contribution *Ma collection* of 1971.[21] [...]

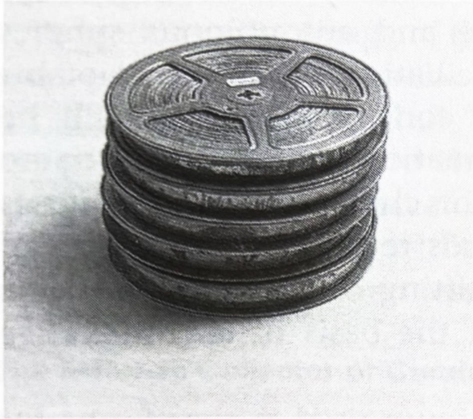
Although Broodthaers was temporarily a member of the Communist Party, he was never a political artist in a strict sense. Broodthaers' position can best be described in terms of Walter Benjamin, who suggested gauging the political intention of an oeuvre by its position within the relations of production and not by the oeuvre's stance towards them. Not any old partisanship, but rather the reflection of the conditions of producing art must be the object of the artist's project.[22] Yet Benjamin Buchloh goes too far in his critique of Beuys when, with reference to Walter Benjamin, he positions the 'aestheticism of politics' by Beuys against the 'politicization of art' by Broodthaers.[23] To begin with, this polarization is bound by the historical antagonism between fascism and communism and is not easily applied elsewhere. Most of all, however, Buchloh underestimates the sculptural quality of Beuys' oeuvre, which he does not distinguish from his theoretical work; conversely, Buchloh overestimates the political dimension of Broodthaers, who was not producing a politicization but rather a form of poeticized art. [...]

In looking at and coming to terms with Germany's past and its culture, the different historical starting points of the two artists becomes apparent, and both have to be taken into account. While for Beuys his own experience of the war, against the background of the reports on Auschwitz, led to a personal crisis, for Broodthaers it was possible to continue the tradition of the avant-garde without rupture. In regard to the self-stylizing of the artists, Beuys makes use of the role of the shaman who tries to reconcile the ruptures in our culture and society with psychic powers. Broodthaers, on the other hand, makes use of the role of Narcissus to renew the suicidal dangers of such dreams of unification. Broodthaers critiqued traditional institutions in founding his fictitious museum, while Beuys sought a concrete change to society through his diverse organizations, and especially in his function as a teacher and, later, as a member of the Green Party.

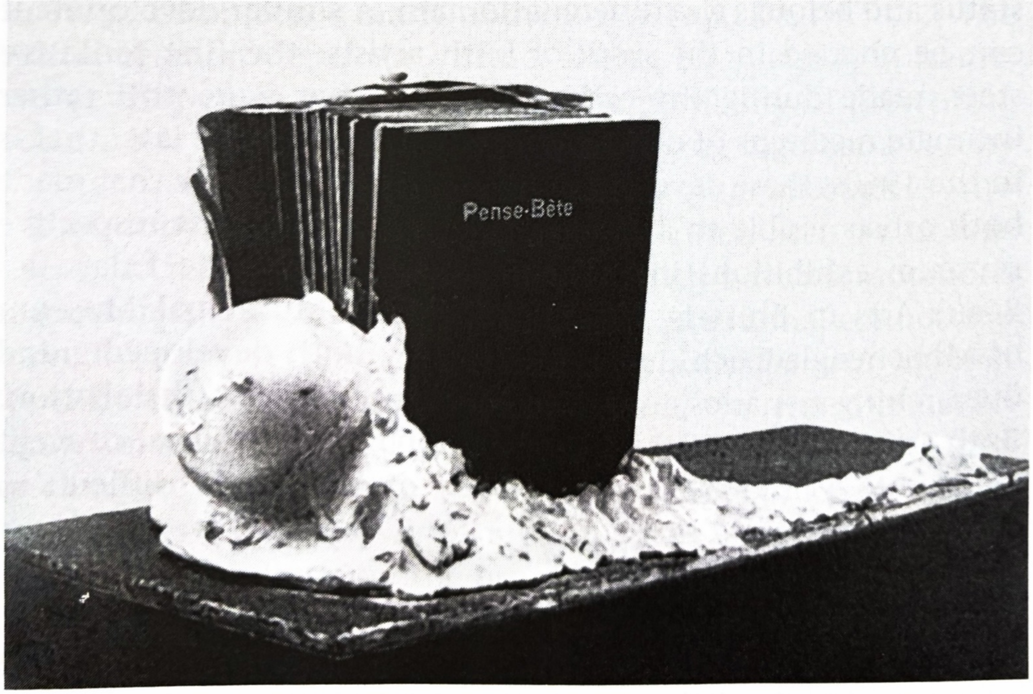
It is necessary to separate Beuys' discursive activity in the form of speeches, podium discussions, organizations and interviews from his sculptural activity, as Theodora Vischer has pointed out.[24] This essay does not seek to analyze in detail the function of the discursive activity of both artists; however, their differing rhetorical styles do point in a certain direction. In her comparison of Beuys and Broodthaers, Maria Kreutzer analyzes their relationship to language and applies the semantic dimension of the Greek term 'word' as *mythos* and *logos* to both artists.[25] While the sharp, subtle, refined and cultivated language of Broodthaers in its varying literary forms continuously reveals the poet, Beuys' harsh, vivid and reduced language follows the principle of simplification and communication.[26] As such, the discursive activity of Beuys is grouped into the sphere of reality, while the diverse literary forms in Broodthaers' oeuvre – especially his open letters, of which we have seen two examples here – form an integral part of his 'Gesamtkunstwerk' and whose artificial and fictitious character placed them in the sphere of art.

In what follows, I will discuss the extent to which the oeuvres of Beuys and Broodthaers differ on an artistic and visual level. In dealing with Duchamp, Beuys criticizes the 'hermetic, private enclosure of Duchamp's system, something I have described as a sphere of silence rather than one of communication...'[27] In the multiple *Das Schweigen* ('The Silence') of 1973 (Fig. 3.1), Beuys galvanized five rolls of Ingmar Bergman's film with the same title. In comparable fashion, Broodthaers covered the remaining editions of his own poem booklet in plaster in his programmatic sculpture *Pense-Bête* of 1964 (Fig. 3.2), in order to manifest his transition from poet to artist. The fact that this book was made impossible to read – accompanied with the silence of the poet – became the precondition for a new form of communication on a visual level.

In a similar manner, Beuys allows his multiple to 'silence the silence' of Duchamp in order to open the door to a new form of communication by means of titling the individual film spools.[28] While Broodthaers uses the negation affirmatively, Beuys' negation of a negation automatically sets an affirmation. Thus a



3.1. Joseph Beuys, *Das Schweigen* ('The Silence'), 1973; © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



3.2. Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête*, 1964; © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SABAM, Brussels.

visual comparison of these two similarly structured artworks reveals a symptomatic difference between these poles. Where Broodthaers tried to render productive the dialectical tension between opposing poles, Beuys tried to overcome contradiction in order to achieve a higher synthesis. In order to apply this to the relationship between art and life it may be said that Beuys rejected an insistence on separate and autonomous spheres and instead strove for their reconciliation on the level of his *'erweiterter Kunstbegriff'* (expanded concept of art), which he viewed as a consequence and continuation of the path Duchamp had pursued. While Beuys included his choice of artistic elements in order to express his shift towards reality, the invention of the readymade emphasized the shifting of the boundary as a universal strategy that could form the basis of all innovative gesticulations.[29] [...]

The variety of media and techniques used is significant for the oeuvres of both artists. Not only their nationalities but also their original professions as sculptor and as poet remain characteristic for their entire work. Against this background, it once again becomes evident that the level of discursive activity used by each artist in relation to visual art occupies a different status and belongs to a different domain. A similar development can be charted in the work of both artists: the first tentative steps made during the early 1950s in what were still rather intimate mediums of drawing and poetry; relatively late, that is in the 1960s, these developed into independent work that made both artists visible to a wider audience in their first respective museum exhibitions in 1967 – Broodthaers in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, and Beuys in the Municipal Museum of Mönchengladbach. In the 1970s they both developed grand overarching scenarios, increasingly oriented toward installation. Both artists demonstrate the dissolution of a traditional concept of art into a fluid art process, which makes it very difficult to deal with their work today. [...]

The Artists' Roles in Performance and Film

The different costumes Broodthaers and Beuys invented correspond to the different roles in which the artists functioned as actors within their respective performances[30] or films.[31] [...] With his traditional style of clothing, Broodthaers connects more to the figure of the dandy, while Beuys appears as a nomad armed for survival. [...]

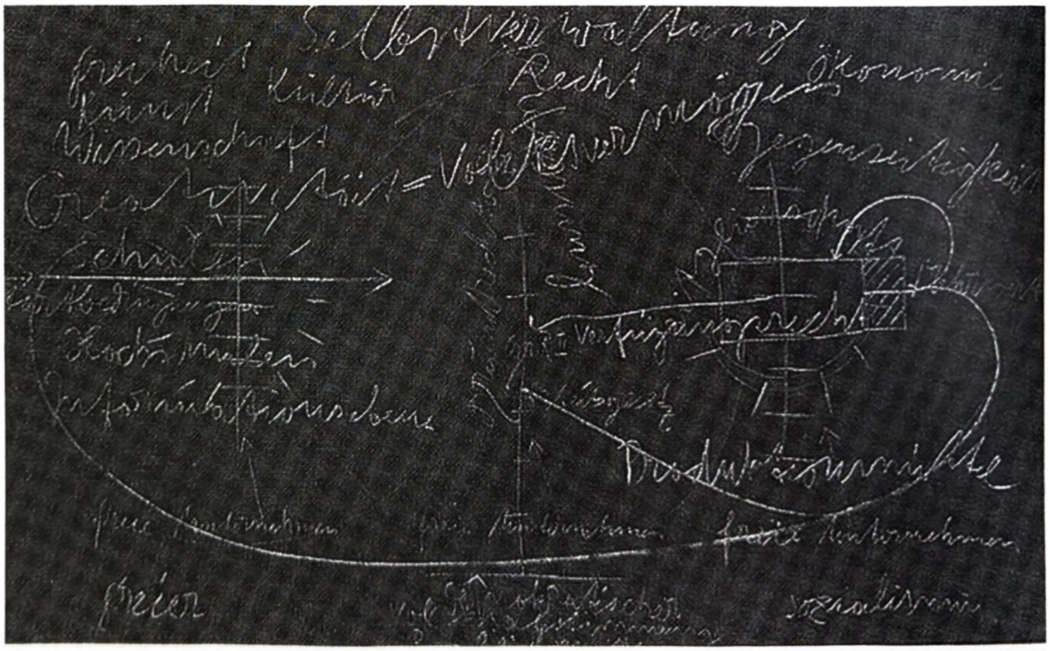
While Broodthaers' performances indicate a classical understanding of roles, Beuys' interest was not in the role itself but in the visualizing of an image: the image of the messiah, the shepherd, the traveller, nomad or shaman that in the end collapsed into the image of the artist. Broodthaers may not have used professional actors for his films (this was never possible for financial reasons), but Beuys' performances were always inseparably connected to the artist's persona, to his charisma and his physical presence.[32] Broodthaers as an actor appears to stand outside himself, while Beuys melts completely into his role, becomes mediator, messiah and agitator.

The Artist as Collector or Curator: Art in Vitrines

The single most striking similarity between both artists was in their use of vitrines as a form of presenting art, which has continued in numerous variations to this day. Vitrines appear in the work of Beuys in his exhibition at the Municipal Museum in Mönchengladbach in 1967, where he found cabinets viewable from all sides; these were an appropriate form of presentation for his range of objects – many of them small and fragile.[33] [...] The frontal orientation of the vitrine, resting on a high iron frame, was developed in 1971 and offers the possibility of presenting works from different periods and of bringing together a variety of objects, relics, textiles, remnants and other substances into a new unity. However, his vitrines are often seen as storage places for relics from performances, which have connotations of mustiness and of reliquary cults. The intentional connection with the history of art cabinets and *Wunderkammern* (cabinet of curiosities) is made especially vivid in the Darmstadt Landesmuseum's natural history sections. While Beuys intended to combine science and art with this form of presentation, Broodthaers used this very museum-like form of presentation to lay more emphasis on the process of 'musealization'. Vitrines appear in the oeuvre of Broodthaers in connection with his museum concept and especially in his big retrospectives of the final two years, 1974–76. This 'vitrinization' combined a didactic and ironic aspect that demonstrated the process promoted by the museum in forming myths and metasymbols.[34] [...]

The Message of the Artist: Art on Blackboards

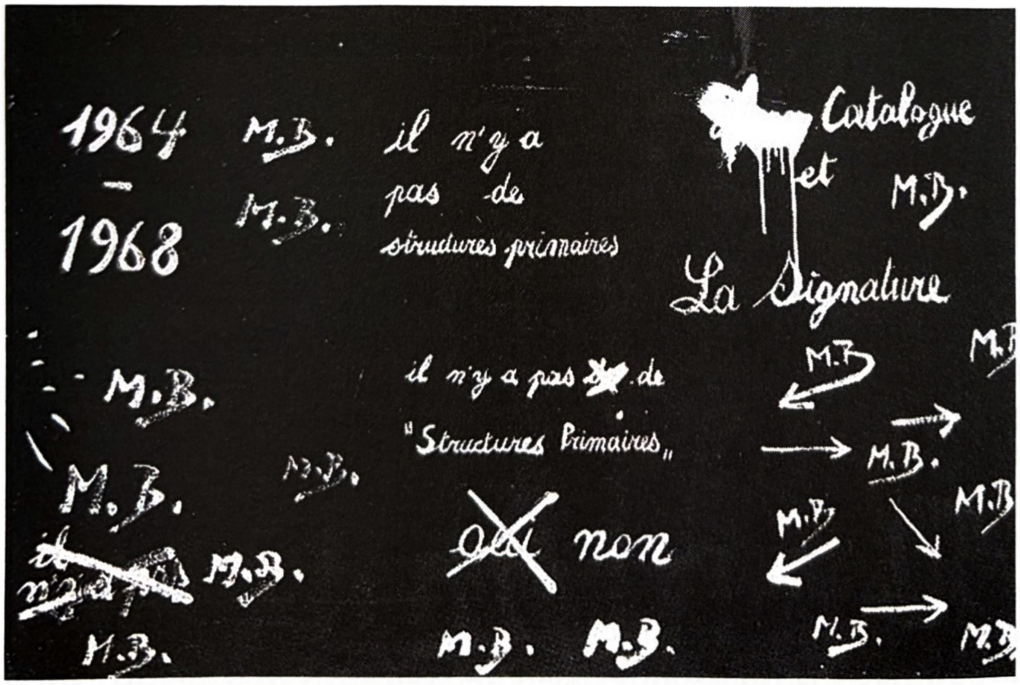
The blackboards in Beuys' oeuvre take on a position between a didactic instrument and an independent work of art.[35] Beuys used blackboards from his first Fluxus concert in the early 1960s. The blackboard began to play a major part in his oeuvre with the performance *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) schottische Symphonie* of 1970. As tools and relics of performances or speeches they belonged to the domain of conceptual discourse. At times they form new works and even determine the structure of installations, such as *Richtkräfte* ('Directional Forces') of 1974–1977. Beyond their formal analogy to Rudolf Steiner's boards, both have to do with a didacticism that is aimed at achieving a powerful effect. The frequently poor state of the blackboards and their more unprompted rather than organized inscriptions serve as a guarantee for the spontaneity and genuineness of the effect intended; the deliberate absence of 'aesthetic packaging' enhances the immediate power of the message. The thesis of Beuys' intended unity and wholeness can be confirmed by the first version of the blackboard *Freie demokratischer Sozialismus* ('Free Democratic Socialism', Fig. 3.3) shown at Documenta 5 in



3.3. Joseph Beuys, *Freier demokratischer Sozialismus* ('Free Democratic Socialism'), 1972; © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

1972 in Kassel; the second version was exhibited one year later in the exhibition *Kunst im politischen Kampf* ('Art in the Political Struggle') at the Kunstverein Hannover. As Helmut Leppien described them: 'The triad of signs and concepts referred clearly to Rudolf Steiner, whose image was integrated by Beuys into his own space, whilst retaining its style of speaking: the titular state form of "free democratic socialism" divides into the three areas of freedom, civil rights and economy. Beuys demonstrated his vision of an inseparable unity of artistic work and political activism in unifying the image of the three overlapping spheres with an enlarged numeral three.'[36]

In contrast to the large number of blackboards in the oeuvre of Beuys, there are only two blackboards with the title and inscription *Les Aigles* from 1970 in the work of Broodthaers. [...] More interesting in this context is one of his few oil-on-canvas paintings *Il n'y a pas des structures primaires* of 1968 (Fig. 3.4); the white lettering upon a black background is reminiscent of a blackboard. By consciously imitating the character of a blackboard with handwritten and crossed out letters, he also accentuates the eminent artistic character of the work, even adding a swab of red paint. In the centre the title 'Il n'y a pas des



3.4. Marcel Broodthaers, *Il n'y a pas des structures primaires*, 1968; © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SABAM, Brussels.

structures primaries' appears twice; in its negation it refers to the exhibition *Primary Structures* of 1966,[37] and generally sums up the artist's first working period between 1964 and 1968. Broodthaers expresses his rejection of any kind of claim to absoluteness, be it in the field of ideology, science or art. Broodthaers confronts the idealism of immediacy, authenticity and unity with his brand of relativism, in which the sign, the object or that which generally exists, is shown as being of a historic or mediated nature.

Beuys uses the blackboards to support his messages, which gain a verified and authentic value because extinction and over-inscription is always immediately and spontaneously possible. For Broodthaers any intention appears dominated by concrete power structures; any message is determined by its linguistic and visual form.[38]

The visual comparison of works by Beuys and Broodthaers reveals that both work repeatedly with contradictions: Beuys seeks to illustrate the ephemerality and the common bond of 'polarized states' by emphasizing physical substance, whereas Broodthaers does the reverse in articulating the situation of a dualistic fragmentation as *conditio humana* and as a scope for his artistic development.

Both artists refer to the nineteenth century and to Romanticism in particular as an historical context for their concepts.[39] While artistic self-assertions cannot be examined more closely here, the position of Werner Hofmann should be mentioned. In his various analyses of this period he pointed to the 'ruptures and anticipations', 'the dissonances and contradictions', in short to 'polyfocality' as the crucial characteristic of the 'divided century' which he allows to terminate, dialectically, between reconciliation and confrontation.[40] The art-historical reappraisal of this period evokes a fundamental re-evaluation of the Romantic period as the real origin of modernity, which was split from the start by a conflict between the poetic on the one hand and philosophical/scientific modernity on the other.[41] The central figures of Romantic consciousness, the reflexivity of the artwork and the fantastic, are first rediscovered by Walter Benjamin and the French Surrealists as central *leitmotifs* of modernity. Broodthaers is rooted in Belgian Surrealism; consequently he is already situated in this tradition of linking the theoretical domain of critique, irony and reflection with one of an imaginativefantastic nature. One might point to Magritte's play with the reflexivity of the artwork that no longer creates the illusion of a consistent relation between reproduction and reality, but manages a reciprocal reflection on both contrasting poles.

In comparison, 'the entire oeuvre of Beuys is based on the concept of polarities which lead to a synthesis. With the model of sculptural theory, a concept of unifying poles has found its systematization and universalization.'[42] Theodora Vischer finds that such thinking is based on the harmony of poles conceptualized in the relation of science and art within Romanticism. The parallels between Beuys and the early German Romantic period are particularly convincing, and can be proven, for example, in Novalis' dictum, 'Every human being should be an artist. Everything can become fine arts,'[43] or in his concept of polarity: 'Polarity is an imperfection – originally there should be no polarity.'[44]

Beginning in the early Romantic period, the path towards modernity evidently reveals a pattern of rationalism and re-mythification.[45] Following this path from its common historical source, two different lines of development become apparent, which I want to describe using the notion of the Romantic discovery of the subject as an individual, since the artistic self-concept is an especially significant aspect in the comparison between Beuys and Broodthaers.[46] This turning towards the self that begins with Descartes is affected by ambivalence between an increasing demand for freedom on the one hand and the ensuing loss of existential certainty on the other. This tension between a gain in selfhood and a loss of world provokes two different lines of development, which in turn accentuate the aspect of gaining freedom or that of a break in the bond with the world.

The first of the two paths is consistent with the Romantic notion of self-development and self-realization, i.e. the expressive and creative side of the subject. This notion is found in Novalis' remark 'everyone should be an artist,' in the most extreme form of heightened individualism in the genius cult of Richard Wagner, in Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, and can also be tracked in Beuys' dictum 'everyone is an artist.'

The other path that can be traced is a dismantling of the absolute subject which results from the experience of temporality, plurality and relativity of the human subject. This can be traced in Kant's critique of the power of judgement [*Urteilskraft*], in the surrealist discovery of the subconscious and also in Broodthaers' ambivalent *Eloge du Sujet*.[47] I refer here to the title of a work and an exhibition by Broodthaers of 1975, in which he operates with a double meaning of *Sujet* (subject and theme/object). The clear precedent once again is Magritte, and Broodthaers further develops his script-images into a three-dimensional work by giving diverse objects contradictory inscriptions. When, for example, a bowler hat is inscribed with 'Sujet', there is no doubt as to which subject Broodthaers praises. However, at the same time it is Cartesian 'praise' for a self-conscious subject that can fashion the activity of recognition into the object of epistemology, albeit at the cost of one's own identity.

Beuys tried to compensate for personal crisis and the resulting lack of existential security with a programmatic reconciliation between art and life. Important indicators of this attitude have been identified by Cornelia Klinger as 'characteristic elements of the Romantic complex which result from an examination of historical Romanticism as well as the renaissance of the Romantic syndrome in later constellations':[48]

- the turn towards aesthetics, as is advanced in the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and continued in Beuys' expanded concept of art;
- the turn towards the community, as found in early life-reform movements and in the wide circle of students and disciples around Beuys;
- the turn towards nature, as developed in the Romantic philosophy of nature and carried out in Beuys' ecological engagement, such as in his project *7,000 Oaks*;
- the turn towards mythology and to the subject, best described in Harald Szeemann's paradoxical notion of 'individual mythology'.

In contrast, 'with Baudelaire we see … the failure of the utopia of reconciliation with the critical reflection of a social world that could not be made to look better. A relation of opposites had come into being; art had become a critical mirror, showing the irreconcilable nature of the aesthetic and the social worlds.'[49] In this uninterrupted tradition Broodthaers followed an avant-garde conception of art that does not try to compensate for the change in its concept of reality and of the subject; instead it represents and reflects. Important origins for this attitude are:

- the historical and cultural roots of the subject, as it is elaborated from historicism to Broodthaers' consciousness of tradition;
- the determing element of language for the subject, from the language theories of Wittgenstein to the French Structuralists to the poeticization of art extended by Broodthaers to all areas of life;
- the decay of the subject through the discovery of the unconscious, as it is articulated in Lacan's combination of psychological and linguistic method and as a symbolic strategy of appearance in the work of Broodthaers.

Despite the reduction and schematizing that is characteristic of a comparison between Beuys and Broodthaers, the two paths of development outlined here suggest two general positions of modernity. The contrasting nature of these two positions makes them simultaneously dependent on and mutually exclusive of each other. The relation of these two lines of development is a coherent pattern of reaction which oscillates between 'conciliation and confrontation,' synthetic and analytic thought, between the claim for the absolute and the concept of contingency.

NOTES

* In Christian Posthofen Köln (ed.), *Essays on the Oeuvre of Films by Marcel Broodthaers* (National Galerie Berlin, Verlag Walther König, 2001), pp. 93–127, translated by Viola Michely and Kayvan Rouhani.

1. *Wide White Space. Hinter dem Museum 1966–1976* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995).

2. Anny de Decker (ed.), *Joseph Beuys, Eurasienstab* (Antwerp, 1987), p. 5.
3. Marcel Broodthaers, 'Mon cher Beuys', Brussels, 14 July 1968, facsimile in Marcel Broodthaers (Paris: Galerie national du Jeu de Paumes, 1991), p. 22.
4. Birgit Pelzer, 'Recourse to the Letter', in *October* 42 (1987), pp. 157–81, and, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Broodthaers. Writings, Interviews, Photographs* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 67–100. See also Dorothea Zwirner, 'Marcel Broodthaers – Je manifest manifestement', in *Manifeste: Intentionalität. Avant Garde Critical Studies 11* (1998), pp. 141–60, especially p. 150.
5. It is interesting that Broodthaers mentions Beuys and Dutschke in the same sentence. Their first encounter did not take place until the 'working place' of the FIU near the *Honey Pump* in Kassel at Documenta 6 in August 1977; see Johannes Stüttgen in his article on Rudi Dutschke in the 'Beuysnobiskum' in *Joseph Beuys* (Zurich: Kunsthaus Zürich, 1993), pp. 255f. A poem by Heinrich Böll also refers to the affinity between Beuys and Dutschke, although presented with a critical undertone; see 'Für Beuys zum 60. – In memoriam Rudi Dutschke' in *Die Zeit*, 8 June 1981, p. 38.
6. Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979), p. 17.
7. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'The Twilight of the Idol', *Artforum* (January 1980), pp. 35–40; reprinted in this volume.
8. Buchloh, 'The Twilight of the Idol', p. 66.
9. The role of the artist and his possibilities of self-reflection become obvious in Broodthaers, *Magie. Art et Politique*, Paris 1973, here under the title *Être Artiste – Être Narzisse*. See also Rainer Borgmeister, 'La Signature, L'Artiste', in *Marcel Broodthaers, L'Oeuvre graphique – Essais* (Geneva: Centre Genevois de Gravure Contemporaine, Geneva, 1991), pp. 43–52; Dorothea Zwirner, 'Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand ...' ('Mirror, mirror on the wall...'), in Wilfried Dickhoff (ed.), *Marcel Broodthaers* (Cologne: 1994), pp. 230–47.
10. Joseph Beuys, quoted from 'Wenn sich keiner meldet, zeichne ich nicht' (a conversation between Joseph Beuys, Heiner Bastian, Jeannot Simmen, Düsseldorf, 8 August 1979) in *Joseph Beuys – Zeichnungen, Tekeningen, Drawings* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1979), p. 32.
11. Anny de Decker, 'Bericht über die Beziehung zwischen der Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerpen und der Akademie von Düsseldorf in dem Zeitraum 1965–1970' ('Report on the

Relations between the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerpen and the Düsseldorf Academy'), in *Brennpunkt Düsseldorf* (Düsseldorf: Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, 1987), p. 116.

12. de Decker, p. 116.
13. The elements Broodthaers describes have most to do with the work *Fond II*; see Theodora Vischer, *Beuys und die Romantik* (Cologne: Walther König, 1983), p. 14, excerpts in this volume.
14. Broodthaers was not chosen to participate in Documenta in 1968, but was represented by the Wide White Space Gallery in the rooms of a hotel in Kassel, where films by Broodthaers and Beuys were shown; see the interview by Anny de Decker and Bern Lohaus in *Wide White Space,* pp. 45ff.
15. See Birgit Pelzer, 'Die symbolischen Strategien des "semblant"', in *Essays on the oeuvre of films by Marcel Broodthaers* (Cologne: Walther König and the National Galerie Berlin, 2001), pp. 45–74.
16. Marcel Broodthaers, 'Museum für Moderne Kunst – Werbeabteilung', in *Heute Kunst* 1 (April 1973), pp. 20–23.
17. Michael Compton, 'Marcel Broodthaers', in *Marcel Broodthaers* (Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 1980), p. 19.
18. Broodthaers, 'Mon cher Beuys', Düsseldorf, 25 September 1972, reprinted in German, English and French in *Magie. Art et Politique* (Paris: Multiplicata, 1973), p. 14.
19. Introduction to Broodthaers' text 'Politik der Magie', in *Rheinische Post*, Düsseldorf, 3 October 1972.
20. Two of Hans Haacke's works that were planned for this exhibition were to disclose the conditions of land ownership in Manhattan using photographs of building façades in Manhattan in conjunction with explanatory texts; this was to form part of his work on social systems. The museum director explained this rejection, pointing to an exhibition policy which excluded active engagement in social and political questions. See *Hans Haacke, Unfinished Business* (New York: MIT Press and The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), pp. 96ff.
21. Stefan Germer, 'Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys', *October* 45 (1988); reprinted in this volume.
22. Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art New York, 1984), pp. 297–309.
23. Buchloh, 'The Twilight of the Idol', pp. 75–77.
24. Theodora Vischer, *Joseph Beuys. Die Einheit des Werkes* (Cologne: Walther König, 1991).

25. Maria Kreutzer, '"Plastische Kraft" und "Raum der Schrift", Überlegungen zu den Kunstauffassungen von Beuys und Broodthaers', in *Brennpunkt Düsseldorf*, pp. 19–24.
26. Vischer, *Joseph Beuys. Die Einheit des Werkes*, p. 87; Walter Grasskamp writes about Beuys' profiteering with terminology in *Der lange Marsch durch die Illusionen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), pp. 64–78; Max Reithmann identifies the pre-linguistic/imaginary as a condition for Beuys' own speech; see his 'Sprache Bild und Gegenwärtigkeit bei Beuys', in *Brennpunkt Düsseldorf*, p. 46.
27. *Joseph Beuys* (Luzern: Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1979), n.p.
28. See Harald Szeemann's description of 'Das Schweigen' as well as his Duchamp article in 'Beuysnobiscum', both in *Joseph Beuys* (Zurich: Kunsthaus Zürich, 1993), pp. 90f. and pp. 253–255.
29. Boris Groys, *Über das Neue* (Munich/Vienna, 1992), pp. 73ff; for a comparison between Beuys and Duchamp see also Vischer, *Joseph Beuys. Die Einheit des Werkes,* p. 249, and Grasskamp, 'Soziale Plastik – Schwierigkeiten mit Beuys', in *Der lange Marsch durch die Illusionen,* p. 75.
30. Uwe M. Schneede, *Joseph Beuys – Die Aktionen* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1994).
31. *Marcel Broodthaers. Cinéma* (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1997).
32. In this respect, Beuys' performances differed from the anonymity of the Fluxus event, sometimes executed by artists but not necessarily by the authors/composers. For Beuys' rapprochement towards and distancing from Fluxus see Schneede, *Joseph Beuys Die Aktionen*, pp. 9–12.
33. Gerhard Theewen, *Joseph Beuys – Die Vitrinen* (Cologne: Walther König, 1993); and together with Harald Szeemann in exhibition catalogue *Joseph Beuys* (Zürich: Kunsthalle Zürich, 1993), pp. 113–137.
34. Isabelle Graw, 'Glasstürze. Kunst in der Vitrine', *Artis*, 42 (March 1990), p. 53.
35. Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1979), pp. 204–206.
36. Helmut R. Leppien, *Joseph Beuys in der Hamburger Kunsthalle* (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1991), p. 36.
37. *Primary Structures* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1968); the title of this exhibition curated by Kynaton McShine became synonymous with 'Minimal Art.'
38. Concerning his vacuum-formed plastic plaques, Marcel Broodthaers speaks of a complete rejection of a clear message:

'Do not limit the message to either image or text. This means refusing the relief provided by a clear message. [...] For me, there can be no direct relation between art and message and even less so if this message is political; otherwise one can get burnt by the artefact', in the interview with Irmeline Lebeer, 'Dix mille francs de récompense', in *Catalogue/Catalogus* (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1974), p. 64.

39. Vischer, *Beuys und die Romantik*; see also her essay in this volume.
40. Werner Hofmann, *Das entzweite Jahrhundert. Kunst zwischen 1750 und 1830* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), p. 676.
41. Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Die Kritik der Moderne* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1989) undertakes an historically oriented analysis and offers insights stretching from early Romantic criticism of Heine and Hegel, the modern renaissance of Romanticism by Walter Benjamin and the French surrealists, and the aesthetic turn-around in the criticism of Wilhelm Dilthey, Ricarda Huch and Carl Schmitt.
42. Vischer, *Beuys und die Romantik*, p. 67.
43. Vischer, *Beuys und die Romantik*, p. 60.
44. Vischer, *Beuys und die Romantik*, p. 69.
45. Cornelia Klinger, *Flucht Trost Revolte – Die Moderne und ihre ästhetischen Gegenwelten* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1995), p. 7.
46. Klinger, Chapter 3: 'Die Wendung zum Subjekt als Individuum', pp. 105ff.
47. Peter Bürger, *Das Verschwinden des Subjekts. Eine Geschichte der Subjektivität von Montaigne bis Barthes* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1998).
48. Klinger, *Flucht Trost Revolte.*
49. Jürgen Habermas, 'The unfinished project of Modernity', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), p. 10; see also Klinger's model of correlation, *Flucht Trost Revolte*, p. 33.

9. NO TO… JOSEPH BEUYS*

ROSALIND KRAUSS

LAUGHING ABOUT THE PUN it incarnated, since the German for chair ('Stuhl') is also the polite term for shit (stool), Beuys was happy to give an excremental spin to his celebrated sculpture *Fat Chair* (1964):

> I placed [the fat] on a chair to emphasize this, since here the chair represents a kind of human anatomy, the area of digestive and excretive warmth processes, sexual organs and interesting chemical change, relating psychologically to willpower … '[S]hit' …, too, is a used and mineralized material with chaotic character, reflected in the cross-section of fat.[1]

He was also eager to place his preferred materials – wax, felt, fat, a thick brown paint with which he coated many of his assemblages, musty old objects he gathered together as so much detritus – at the service of a set of performance rituals, so that they would function as the remains of so many acts of communion, the relics of so many elaborated rites. Carrying his felt-wrapped walking stick or his shapeless knapsack, or huddled beneath a felt blanket next to a pacing coyote, he thus took on a succession of roles: of shaman, of wandering Jew, of scapegoat, of martyr.

All of this – the scatological nature of the materials, the insistence on the sacred – might strike one as textbook Bataille, especially since Beuys' various allegories of the sacred tended to join high and low to articulate the sacrificial figure as an exemplary being catapulted from his position as sovereign into an identification with the lowest of his social subjects.[2] Beuys himself projected this dual identity in one of his last works, *Palazzo Regale* (1985), a funerary monument organized as an allegorized double self-portrait in which the paraphernalia of the tramp or beggar are laid out in one glass-walled sarcophagus and the regalia of the king or emperor in the other.

In the course of analyzing *Palazzo Regale,* Thierry de Duve speaks of Beuys as reflecting, in all their variety, the denizens of that fabled land from which the personality of the romantic artist was thought to have sprung, the land in which the outcast rises above the heads of the philistines, where love redeems the lost and dying, and where the only true nobility is that of talent, the land that came to be called 'la boheme'.[3] Because the modernist artist was thought of as emerging from this country, as the harbinger of a form of life not territorialized by the social divisions created by industrialization, and thus as the incarnation of the almost unthinkable condition of non-alienated labour, the early modern avant-garde had projected utopian visions from this very place of marginalization. And Beuys, eager to promote his own aestheticized version of a post-capitalist Utopia – what he called a 'social sculpture' – worked specifically to transcode the character of the bohemian into that of the proletarian, the figure whom Marx had cast as both the subject and object of history, who would rise from the ashes of capitalism as the controller of his own labour power, producing his own being as value. Collapsing these two figures – bohemian and proletarian – together, Beuys came up with the redemptive phrase, 'Each man is an artist,' thus recasting each specific act of labour – the nurse at her station, the digger in the ditch – as creative and thus an act of sculpting, just as he proclaimed every spoken word an element in the same great collective work.

If, however, Marx was repelled by Bohemia – not the mythical one of Murger, but the real one of the lumpen proletariat – it was because these motley figures, gathering in the interstices of the great social divide between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, had dropped out of the system of representation on which both class identification and class struggle depended. Representing nothing, they were thus a scandal for the logic of history.

Yet, it was for this very same reason – that they had been able to void the economy of *representation* – that the lumpen proletariat fascinated Bataille. For the *informe* is of course grounded on the wreckage of representation, of assimilating everything to form. In the articles he wrote after 1934 for *La Critique sociale,* Bataille explored the subversive work – the transgression from below, the (in *his* terms) scatology – of the lumpen, seeing it as something that could not be assimilated within rule-regulated, representative society, the society of the 'homogeneous.' On the contrary, what interested Bataille was the fact that homogeneous society, anxious to submit everything to the laws of efficiency and thus to recycle all its products, nonetheless produces waste that it cannot assimilate – excremental waste that builds up as a heterogeneous threat.

It is Beuys' drive toward a totalized system in which everything is recuperated by the 'social sculpture' that we see the fault lines opening up between his idea of the excremental or the heterogeneous and that of Bataille's. Added to Beuys' belief in total assimilation ('Every man is an artist'; every speech act is a sculpture) there is his interpretation of the shamanistic figure as the one who reveals the form always already locked within the chaos of matter, who therefore informs matter. Speaking of his use of fat as dramatizing this work of form giving, of *Gestaltung,* Beuys said, 'In this way I could transform the character of this fat from a chaotic and unsettled state to a very solid condition of form … [with] a geometrical context as its end.'[4] And, indeed, Beuys' allegorical use of substances, and his constant insinuation of his own body into a network of myth, was devoted to this idea of breathing *logos* into his materials, so that by assuming form they would also be resurrected as meaning.

Beuys' notion of total recuperation connected to a system from which nothing escapes being impressed into the service of meaning is thus involved in an idea of the sacred that is as far away as possible from that of Bataille's. Beuys' expressionism, his mythico-religious drive, found echoes in many other practices in post-war Europe, most prominently those of Hermann Nitsch, who dominated the Vienna *Aktionismus* group with his own performances of a redemptive version of sacrificial self-mutilation. As should be more than clear by now, the *formless* is inimical to this drive toward the transcendental, which always tries to recuperate the excremental, or the sacrificial fall, by remaking it as *theme*.

NOTES

* In Yves Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books/MIT Press, 1997), pp. 143–6.

1. Götz Adriani, et. al., *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works* (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's, 1979), p. 72, as cited by Benjamin Buchloh in 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol', *Artforum*, no. 18 (January 1980), p. 39 (reprinted in this volume).
2. See Georges Bataille, 'La Structure psychologique du fascisme' ('The Psychological Structure of Fascism'), *La Critique sociale,* no. 10 (Nov. 1933), pp. 159–65 and no. 11 (March 1934), pp. 205–11; Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes,* vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1970–), pp. 339–71; Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 137–60.
3. Thierry de Duve, 'Joseph Beuys, or The Last of the Proletarians', *October* no. 45 (summer 1988).
4. Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, *Joseph Beuys, Is It about a Bicycle?* (Paris: Verona, 1985), pp. 91–93, as cited in Eric Michaud, 'The Ends of Art according to Beuys', *October,* no. 45 (summer 1988), p. 39.

20. JOSEPH BEUYS AND SURREALISM

Roundtable*

BENJAMIN BUCHLOH, JEAN-FRANÇOIS CHEVRIER AND CATHERINE DAVID

Benjamin Buchloh: In my opinion, the only artist who really continues the surrealist project after the war – except in the context of American abstract expressionism, where it's more complicated – is Beuys. He is the only artist who is a surrealist after the fact in Germany, the only artist who recovers and refashions a history that gives the notion of the unconscious a central place in the production of the aesthetic. The paradox is that he does so too late, at a moment when it is completely obsolete and impossible.

Jean-François Chevrier: Of course I see a failure in Beuys, but a romantic failure – and we know how important German romanticism was for the surrealists. Beuys links a residue of surrealism to romanticism, and through a logic of remanence, of the lingering historical echo, he reproduces the romantic failure.

B.B.: Any artist who would try to establish some kind of historical continuity with German romanticism – and I'm not even sure that's the case with Beuys – seems to me, after the advent of fascism, to be a profoundly problematic artist. In this perspective I find it surprising that a historian like Peter Bürger, who is precisely a specialist of surrealism and romanticism, should discover contemporary art through Beuys and not through Arman, or the reception of Duchamp, or Buren or Haacke, not to mention Broodthaers again – artists for whom any continuity is broken once and for all. At the initial moment when the work is engaged in practice, the degree of alienation that is articulated in the work of Arman, by contrast to the degree of cultural continuity in the work of Beuys – even though they both work with found objects, industrial objects, etc. – seems to me to be a necessary condition for work which defines itself as contemporary after the war, whereas there is a totalizing tendency in Beuys' work which it is impossible for contemporary art to fulfill.

J-F.C.: For me, Beuys has this remnant of romanticism through surrealism, as well as a project of reconciliation. There is also a project of totality, with the reprise of the Wagnerian model denounced by Broodthaers, and finally a geopolitical imaginary with the figure of *Eurasia*, which is close to certain German obsessions: but the totalizing project ultimately fails. It fails by the very force of the romantic reference, and in reality it culminates in extraordinary fragmentary invention. There's a magnificent phrase from Novalis about a universe made only of shards: that's Beuys. And, finally, Beuys is pathos in the positive sense, as that which differs from the rationality of the Logos: the impossibility of totality, the inevitability of the fragment. Of course one can ask whether this failure was conscious or not. In any case it is clearly legible in the work. There is none of the blurring for which Artaud reproached Breton.

B.B.: The fetish is legible, the fetishization of obsolete aesthetic concepts is always legible.

J.-F.C.: We can return to Walter Benjamin who enacts the fetish, that's what Adorno doesn't understand. Benjamin takes the mimetic risk of producing fetishes himself, that's why his thought was difficult to accept.

B.B.: Beuys doesn't produce fetishes, he practises them.

J.-F.C.: The artist who really allows for a critique of Beuys is the early Rauschenberg, particularly with the *Feticci Personali* and the *Scatole Personali* of 1952, before the *Combine Paintings*. It's extraordinary how an American artist, coming from media culture, pop culture, but working in an Italian context, can play with the archaism, the sexuality, the unconscious aspects of surrealism. Rauschenberg follows the same procedure of enacting magic as Beuys: he called his works 'personal fetishes'.

B.B.: The complexity of the Duchampian model is present for Rauschenberg and absent for Beuys. That's the difference.

Catherine David: There is also a tremendous naiveté, at the moment of structuralism and the work on ethnography, to think that one can reinstate ritual as an alternative to the commodity.

B.B.: That is effectively one of the problems with Beuys: restoring cult value – to use Benjamin's terms – at the very moment when it has become apparent that the work of art is constituted solely by its exhibition value. That's what Beuys didn't understand, unlike Rauschenberg or Johns, whose light bulb is an object stripped of its magical, fetishist dimension. The same thing is true of Arman from 1959 to 1961, with his boxes, the *Poubelles* and the first *Accumulations*. There's an important transition in those works. It's extremely cruel and crude, but that's the specific aspect of this historical moment of 1959–1961, which doesn't even try to establish any continuity with surrealism, with magic, with cult value, with an unconscious. What historical conditions disqualify the notion of the Freudian unconscious as the central notion of aesthetic production? That's what we haven't defined here.

J.-F.C.: I agree that the comparison with the early Rauschenberg is to the detriment of Beuys, but the comparison is interesting. There is a play with the fetish that is of a different nature; perhaps in Rauschenberg it is more immediately convincing for an intellectual educated in ideology critique, an intellectual conscious of the double historical mutation constituted by the rupture with fascism and the onset of the American-style consumer society. But there is a danger in discounting Beuys' actualization of this archaism by enacting it, playing it out (compare the little objects which are very close to Rauschenberg's, and strictly contemporary, from 1949–1955). I'm thinking of a text by Pierre Clastres from 1967, 'De quoi rient les Indiens?' ('Why do the Indians laugh?). He says mythology is actually very funny. In Beuys there is a play on mythology, on an archaic element which is completely futile to cover up, because it will return by the back door, as the psychoanalysts say. That's exactly what happened in Germany in the eighties, that's what you denounced in 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression'. It happened because of the repression of Beuys.

B.B.: I understood that at the time, because I said that by comparison to Kiefer, Beuys was a fantastic artist!

J.-F.C.: I think that a certain conceptual-structuralist norm rejected surrealism and repressed Beuys along with it, producing the effects of the return of the repressed which happened after 1978, which is the turning point for the regressive art that you denounced. But could it be that by repressing surrealism – not the surrealist tradition, but its underlying stakes – and the stakes of Beuys' archaism, you are actually among the critics who allowed for the regressive return that you denounced? In any case, it should be clear by now that my concern is not the Freudian unconscious, the individualized unconscious.

B.B.: It remains to identify why this repression is specifically German – as I recognize. But beyond this post-war German tradition, it also remains to be clarified whether the scepticism toward surrealism over several generations and on several continents is always a repression. I'm thinking again about Ryman's work in the late fifties, the beginnings of Nouveau Réalisme in the early fifties, the artists of the second German generation like Polke, and even Palermo who was a devoted disciple of Beuys: they all take their distances from the history, theory and practices of surrealism.

J.-F.C.: There is a positive distancing, in the sense where there is a tradition of surrealism which is awful, that's what Artaud denounces: but this positive distancing is accompanied by a repression. I don't know why. Our earlier discussion of the irrational was a beginning, but we would have to go further to understand the whole problem.

NOTE

* From *Politics, Poetics: Documenta X, The Book, Idea and Conception* by Catherine David and Jean-François Chevrier (Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1997), pp. 392–4.